

**MASSACHUSETTS STATE POLICE  
CRIME LABORATORY**

# **Trace Evidence (Paint Samples) Information Paper**

To provide information to submitting agencies on proper procedures for the collection and packaging of paint chips from motor vehicles and other sources



## **Evidence Control Unit**

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## Motor Vehicle Incidents

1. If samples are to be collected from more than one vehicle, the vehicles must not be placed near each other until after the samples have been collected. This is to ensure that there is no chance of contamination. Samples collected from separate vehicles should be packaged in separate exterior packaging.
2. Damaged areas of the vehicle must be photographed before any samples are removed.
3. Any paint chips that are different in appearance from the surface on which they rest should be considered “questioned” samples and packaged separately from known samples. All questioned chips from a general area, such as the “front end of car,” can be put in one paper fold. Each paper fold should then be placed in a paper envelope. Each layer of packaging should be labeled with the location of recovery, date of collection, collector’s name or initials, and the word “questioned.”
4. In addition to any foreign paint present, known samples must also be collected separately. Even if there appears to be no damage, a known sample should be collected.
5. Known paint samples must be collected from each potentially involved vehicle using a clean, sharp blade or tweezers. If needed, the area may be hit with an object to create an indentation in order to remove full chips with all layers present. Samples should total at least one square inch of paint and should include all layers down to the metal. They must be collected from near any damaged areas. If more than one area is damaged, known samples should be taken from each area and kept separate.
6. Each sample must be packaged in a secure paper fold that is placed in a paper envelope and then sealed. Each layer of packaging should be labeled with the vehicle, area of the vehicle the sample was collected from, date of collection, collector’s name or initials, and the word “known.”

## Non-Vehicle Incidents

1. Small objects displaying paint chips should be wrapped in paper and placed in a paper bag. It should be handled as little as possible to prevent loss of any evidence that is not visible. The bag should be labeled with the location from which the object was collected, date of collection, collector’s name or initials, and the word “known” or “questioned,” as appropriate.
2. Loose chips from an unknown source should be packaged in a paper fold and placed in a paper envelope. Each layer of packaging must be labeled with the location of collection, date of collection, collector’s name or initials, and the word “questioned.”
3. Known paint samples should be collected from any potential source of the questioned paint by removing chips with a clean, sharp blade or tweezers. Each layer of packaging should be labeled with the area from which it was collected, date of collection, collector’s name or initials, and the word “known.” If a known sample must be collected from a source which is currently a liquid or a spray paint, please use a non-absorbent object (such as a piece of glass or bare metal) to collect a sample. This item is then packaged in paper, once dry, and labeled as above.

### Contact Information

#### For Scene Response

**GHQ:** 508-820-2121

#### Technical Questions

**Trace Unit:** 508-358-3110  
or 508-358-3100

#### Evidence Submission Appointments

Sudbury: 508-358-3155  
Springfield: 413-205-1837  
Lakeville: 508-946-1310  
Danvers: 978-538-6111